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Pa-Mun-Ki in the Happy Country. Part 2

Laura Ruskin

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Mythcon 52: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

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Abstract

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Keywords

Mythril; Mythopoeic; Fiction; Pa-Mun-Ki in the Happy Country; Laura Ruskin

PA-MUN-KI in the HAPPY COUNTRY by Laura Ruskin

Synopsis



PA-MUN-KI, a traveling juggler and clown, visits the Happy Country expecting to find a ready audience. He finds instead that the Happylanders try so hard to be happy, no one is allowed to have fun. Laughing, joking, even dancing are crimes and severely punished. Not wishing to end up a prisoner, Pa-Mun-Ki makes haste to leave Happy Town, only to lose himself in the side streets. He comes to a school just as it lets out. The children, brought up not to play, trudge sadly homeward. They are not old enough yet to feign happiness. Pa-Mun-Ki gets directions from their schoolmistress, who also expresses her concern for her pupils. Pa-Mun-Ki, grateful and relieved, heads for the border of Happyland. Just as he is crossing, himself gets a nudge of conscience. How can he leave those poor happy people, the children especially? He shames himself into going back after a night's sleep behind the sentry-post.

PART 2



Soon after dawn, Pa-Mun-Ki returned to Happy Town. On a sunwarmed patch of corner near the little grey school, a knot of merchants traded briskly in happiness.

"Happiness is worth a winter coat!"
"Happiness is worth a fire in the hearth!"
"Happiness is worth five golden rings,
four calling birds, three French hens, and a
partridge in a pear-tree!"

Pa-Mun-Ki clutched his sides. "Oh!
Oh! Ow!" making frightful faces, he spun
around on one heel.



The merchants gathered around him anxiously. "Why, friend," said one, "What-ever seems to be the matter? Aren't you happy?"

By now, Pa-Mun-Ki was rolling on the cobbles of the street. "Ow! Ow! Ow! That's just the trouble, kind sirs! I'm too happy! I'm so happy I can't stand it!"

The merchants buzzed among themselves while Pa-Mun-Ki wailed, "Oh, oh, oh! I'm dying of happiness!" and kicked his toes in the air.

The man who had spoken to him first seemed to be the most important personage. "Isn't there any cure?" he asked, "Anything we can do?"

"A cure," puffed the juggler, "yes, there's only one. I have to think of something sad. Otherwise I shall just keep getting happier and happier until finally--"

"Don't! Please don't!" the merchant begged. "Let us help you! Fellows, we must think of something sad. Quickly!"

"Oh, would you, so kindly?" Pa-Mun-Ki brightened. "How happy that would make me--Ouch!"

The merchants stopped every passerby. "Quickly! Quickly! Think of sad things, or this poor fellow will die of happiness!"

A vendor pushing a cart full of candles said, "Summer is sad. All my merchandise melts!"

Pa-Mun-Ki clapped a hand to his brow. "Oh, thank you, good sir! All the candles melted away! Oh, how sad!"



The first man wrung his hands anxiously. "Did that help?"

"A little," said Pa-Mun-Ki. "The pain seemed to ease for just a moment. Oh, oh, it's coming on again! Ow!"

"Sadder!" cried the merchant. "We need something sadder!"

A nobleman in fine brocade trudged by leading a limping horse. The man's pants were torn and the long feather of his cap was bent in half. "Sad? A thrown horse-shoe is sad! I've had to walk these seven miles!"

"Oh, alas!" cried Pa-Mun-Ki, and "Oh, alas!" cried the merchants and the candle-vendor. Other townspeople now came out of their houses and shops to join the crowd.

A farm woman bustled by, her two plump arms around an empty basket. Her apron dripped egg. "Sad news? No chickens! That's sad news! I was going to be a fine rich lady!"

"No chickens!" wailed Pa-Mun-Ki, "Oh, alas!" And "Oh, alas!" wailed the crowd.

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A gangly youth slouched by, a wilted bouquet dangling from his hand. He sniffed one miserable sniff and said, "No girl!"

Pa-Mun-Ki and the throng cried a sympathetic, "Oh, dear! No girl!"

Suggestions began to pepper the sufferer, for it seemed that everyone there had something sad hidden on his mind. In fact, enough sad thoughts were offered to cure a laughing hyena of too much happiness. The clack of shouts swelled to an uproar.

Just then, a sound as of harps was heard above the din, and the crowd fell silent (all but Pa-Mun-Ki). A string of harpists was advancing down the middle of the street. Some were robed in azure and some wore cerulian; others were resplendent in aquamarine doublets and cloaks of cornflower; a few were garbed in finest folds of indigo, for these were the famous Blue Bards of Happiness, whose sole duty it was to play before the presence of the King.

After them came the lords and ladies of the Royal Court of the Happy Country, and next marched the King's Guards. The King himself rode in a shrouded sedan-chair. All His subjects bowed. The bards struck their strings; the chair-bearers shuffled in time; the canopy swayed--And Pa-Mun-Ki lay right in the line of march.

"Way for the King!" cried the Blue Bards.

"Way for the King!" cried the lords and ladies.

"Way for the King!" cried the guards. "He is on his yearly journey through the kingdom, making sure that everyone is happy!"

"I can't 'way,'" Pa-Mun-Ki argued, sitting up. "I'm dying of happiness!"

The tale went from the Bards to the lords to the guards. A chair-bearer whispered it through the canopy drapes. With a swish, the curtains were drawn back and the King himself looked out.

Such a sallow, wan, sunken-in face! Such sagging brows! Such a very unking-like weakness about the jowls! Respect-



fully, Pa-Mun-Ki touched his jester's cap so that its tiny bell tinkled.

"What," demanded the frail and wheezing monarch, "is all this?"

"I'm dying of happiness," Pa-Mun-Ki repeated. "I can't stand so much of it."

"Oh, said the King. "Do you have that trouble, too?"

Pa-Mun-Ki blinked twice. "You mean--"

"Alas, yes," sighed the King. "Happiness has been killing me grain by grain. I used to be robust and healthy, but look at me now--wasted away to a wreck. I'd give anything in my domain to the man who could cure me of all this happiness!"

"Simple," said Pa-Mun-Ki, "just think of something sad. It really works." He waved at the head merchant. "True, good sir?"

"It really does, Sire," the merchant agreed. "Before we helped him think sad thoughts, he was in agony."

"So he was," agreed the people in the crowd.

"Put me down," ordered the King, and stepped out of the sedan-chair. "Now," he commanded one of the lords, "tell me something sad."

"No taxes--think of having an empty treasury."

"No good," said the King, and ordered the Chief Blue Bard to speak.



After so much pondering that Pa-Mun-Ki itched to get a word in, the Chief Bard suggested, "Think of the possibility that there were no more harp strings to be had, and that all our harp strings broke at once, so that none of us could make music again."

"No, no!" groaned the King. "That isn't a sad thought! Now, this is a sad thought. Suppose all the bees stopped making honey--not a lick of honey left in all the world--and I simply have to have honey on my toast in the morning!"

"That," the Chief Bard agreed, "would be sad."

"Very," said the lords and ladies.

The King added, "but not sad enough."

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"No," everyone quickly responded, "not nearly sad enough."

"No birds to twitter," suggested Pa-Mun-Ki. "That would be sad."

"Not sad enough," moaned the King.

"Not sad enough," the people echoed, forlornly.

The town hall clock chimed nine; the children silently left the schoolhouse to walk about in the crisp sunshine. The teacher saw the great crowd from the doorway and shyly approached the King with a curtsy. Her pupils followed with bug-big eyes at all the splendid folk. The case was soon laid before her, and she said, "MY!"

"The saddest thing to me," the schoolmistress went on, "is that because everyone must be happy, the children cannot run or laugh or play, and so they miss the most joyous part of their lives."

And everyone looked at the solemn-faced children, and then at each other.



he King breathed noisily in the hush. "I think," he remarked, "my happiness is cured."

"Ours, also," the people murmured.

"Now," said the King, "we must find a way to cure the children."

"The schoolmistress has cured you," Pa-Mun-Ki spoke up smartly, "and now you must keep your promise to give her anything in your domain!"

"Only name it," the King told her.

"I wish nothing, Your Majesty; only give the children back their right to play. Do away with your laws against laughter. In time, the children can be cured."

"Done," said the King. "For I, myself have suffered under these laws, and so has everyone. Let play and laughter, joking and dancing, singing and merriment return to the Happy Country!"

At once, Pa-Mun-Ki jumped up to one foot while the other balanced a spinning ball. The children cried out and clapped.

"Why," exclaimed the merchant, "You aren't dying at all!"

"Not now, I'm not!" said Pa-Mun-Ki, as he did two cartwheels and a flip. "The King just cured me for good!"

The King of the Happy Country howled with laughter, and of course so did everyone else. Before a hen could lay and cackle, the corner was a tumult of merriment. Pa-Mun-Ki showed the children his funniest tricks, and their laughter sounded like a swift brook running.

"Stay with us, Pa-Mun-Ki," the schoolmistress implored. "Teach us how to feel what the children feel."

"Can't," said Pa-Mun-Ki, "sorry. Have to be off to Down Town. But I know of three good fellows in the stocks, and if you listen to their advice, you can't go wrong. Nice to have met you splendid people. Good-day!"

And before the King could decide to have him held by the guards, Pa-Mun-Ki made his escape by crawling under the Chief Bard's indigo robe. "Well done, Pa-Mun-Ki," he told himself, hurrying on.

"Well," himself replied, "at least now the name has the right country."



THE MAN IN THE GOLDEN HELMET

There is that face
Upon whose countenance
lies a stern and hardy grace.
And each heartbeat reveals another line,
Long drawn with care and sorrow
that no artist would conceal.

There glows behind each eye
a burning cinder of ancient pride,
Knowing both glory and disgrace
and caring not that it
is written upon that face.

There is that face
One which utters at every breath,
And by each line as it traces
the message unconcealed by time...
That Death need not bring low
The noble heart's design.

Gaze upon that jaw, harsh set
and austere in its firm line
Unyielding to the passage of time.
A line which seemingly denies
the mirth which there also lies.

For laughter sits upon that mouth,
The corners upturned in gentle slope
bespeak a patient joy and pleasure
with the measure of his life,
And years brimming full of tender hope.

BY KAREN TRIMBLE
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